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May 20, 2020

Ms. Donna J. Vizian
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator
Office of Mission Support
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Vizian:


I write to express my concerns about the Senior Environmental Employment (SEE) Program's wage scale that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) highlighted in June 24, 2019 its report. Following this report and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) subsequent commitment to implement its recommendations, I request an update on the status of the SEE Manual revision that the agency was schedule to release on April 30, 2020.

The SEE Program is designed to connect EPA offices, laboratories, and research centers with older Americans who can offer significant expertise and experience. In Colorado, program enrollees work in three EPA locations, providing vital support to the agency's operations. Their work is especially important right now as recent reports indicate that EPA is relying heavily on SEE Program participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Despite this program's benefit to the EPA, significant shortcomings exist with how enrollees are paid. As the OIG report notes, EPA has not updated hourly wages since 2010. In the past decade, however, inflation has increased 19 percent and federal employee wages increased 5.4 percent. While grantee organizations manage salaries, the EPA's inaction limits their ability to adjust wages appropriately. The enrollees' ages should not limit their access to fair compensation.

Once EPA implements the recommendations, I am optimistic this program can more justly pay hardworking Americans for their time. I look forward to receiving an update.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

¹ <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/short-staffed-epa-leans-on-older-adjunct-workers-with-no-raises>